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General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

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Monday, 30 September 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Bolivia, His Excellency Mr. Antonio Aranibar Quiroga, on whom I now call.

Mr. Aranibar Quiroga (Bolivia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to convey the congratulations of the Government and the people of Bolivia, President Razali Ismail, on your unanimous election, which is a token of the admiration and esteem in which the peoples of the world hold Malaysia and constitutes just recognition of your merits.

My delegation is grateful to the President of the Assembly at its previous session, Ambassador Diogo Freitas do Amaral, for the remarkable job he did. For the delegation of Bolivia, it was a distinct honour to serve as Vice-President of the Assembly under his able guidance.

I wish also to congratulate Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and extend to him our most sincere appreciation for his valuable contributions to international peace and cooperation, as well as for his insightful and untiring dedication to the cause of the United Nations.

Allow me first to refer to some aspects of the far-reaching structural reform in my country.

Domestically, since 1993, the Administration of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada has been simultaneouslv transforming the State and the system of social participation, while also adapting the productive base of society to enable Bolivia to dynamically meet the demands inherent to the changes in contemporary international life.

The Government of Bolivia's current efforts are essentially based on the consolidation of participatory democratic institutions and on the conviction that economic development must be compatible with care for nature and the environment — in other words, that this must take place within the framework of sustainable development and of respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, in order to make unity in diversity possible.

My Government's national plan confers the highest priority on the struggle against poverty. It strives vigorously to increase work opportunities and seeks a better quality of life for all Bolivians, aiming to enter the twenty-first century with a modern, decentralized, participatory State. This perspective guides our policies of grass-roots participation, educational reform, and capitalization of major public enterprises.

Part and parcel of this landscape of change are our initiatives in support of children, women and the elderly. We are working hard to reduce infant and maternal mortality, to improve levels of nutrition and to provide assistance to those who most urgently need it. These tasks are an essential aspect of our effort to improve the lot of poor families.

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My country is proud of its pluri-cultural and multi-ethnic character, and it is therefore taking important initiatives for the advancement of indigenous peoples. The Vice-President of the Republic, Victor Hugo Cárdenas, is a distinguished representative of Bolivia's Aymará people.

In the international arena, we are actively pursuing peaceful coexistence among States and trying to make international justice a reality.

Our position is based on the principles of equal rights of States, non-intervention in internal affairs, non-recognition of territorial acquisitions by force, respect for human rights and the other fundamental principles of international law.

The support we give to intergovernmental organizations, particularly the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS), reflects our confidence in the potential of multilateral cooperation in a world that is growing ever more complex and interdependent.

At the regional level, we are seeking the economic integration of Latin America and the Caribbean with the aim of establishing optimal conditions for forging a hemispheric community and establishing a united presence as the world opens up and markets expand.

We are seeking the closest possible ties with countries that share our subregional realities, and we are committed to merging the various integration processes. That policy has prompted Bolivia to sign an agreement forming a free-trade area with the members of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay — to sign agreements aimed at updating and reinvigorating the Andean Common Market, made up of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, and to give effect to numerous bilateral treaties to enhance mutual complementarity on the basis of our experiences and the need to foster material and spiritual exchanges between nations.

The physical integration of the countries of the region constitutes another central issue deserving priority attention. We are working actively on the definition of inter-oceanic corridors, and we attach great importance to the future of the Plata Basin and the Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation.

With regard to Bolivia's maritime question, I must inform the international community, as we have done every year, that Bolivia has reiterated in various forums its political willingness to begin negotiations that take proper account of the interests of all the parties involved and ensure Bolivia's sovereign presence with regard to the Pacific Ocean.

No clear willingness to engage in dialogue can yet be seen. However, on the basis of contacts on this matter we can say that, despite historical difficulties and ultranationalist suspicions, minds are opening and objective foundations are being laid with a view to encouraging a timely solution to old problems through the exchange of ideas, the nurturing of mutual trust, mutual interest and hemispheric understanding, in the hope that, before long, brotherhood, equality, justice and the requirements of international peace and cooperation will truly prevail.

This year Bolivia had the honour to act as pro tempore secretariat of the Rio Group, a high-level forum of consultation and political coordination for an important group of Latin American and Caribbean States. In that capacity, Bolivia was the venue of the sixth regular meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group and the European Union, held last April in the city of Cochabamba. On that occasion we reaffirmed our readiness for joint endeavours between Latin America, the Caribbean and Western Europe. The meeting strengthened ties between the two regions, based on respect for human rights, the fundamental rights of citizens and the principles of democracy and political pluralism.

The Ministers highlighted, *inter alia*, the danger of drugs and related problems, recognizing the importance of maintaining political dialogue on this issue at the highest level and agreeing on the need to strengthen the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). The meeting called upon the international community to deal with the phenomenon of drugs through joint action based on the principle of global, shared responsibility. To that end, consideration and support were given to the proposal to hold a special session of the General Assembly in 1998 to address this crucial issue. Worldwide awareness of the need for joint action is reaching its peak, and Bolivia hopes that the proposed meeting will lay down positive guidelines to put an end to the scourge of drugs.

I am also pleased to inform representatives that on 3 and 4 September 1996, again in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, the Meeting of Heads of State of the Rio

Group took place, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the creation of that standing body. It was a great honour for my country to welcome such illustrious guests.

The Presidents and Prime Minister gathered there noted with satisfaction that our region had made significant headway in fighting international crime. As evidence of this, they pointed to the signing in Caracas of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, the results of the Specialized Inter-American Conference on Terrorism, held in Lima, and advances in the development of a hemispheric strategy against drugs and related crimes in the framework of the Inter-American Commission against Drug Abuse.

The Heads of State and Government expressed their satisfaction at the fact that our region had become the first nuclear-weapon-free zone through the adoption of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Final Declaration of the tenth summit expressed the joint position of the Governments of the region on the issues of representative democracy and the eradication of poverty. It placed on record their deep conviction with regard to sustainable development; it set forth precise guidelines on regional integration and trade; it expressed a firm resolve to press ahead in the fight against drugs and related crimes; it emphasized, in particular, the importance of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption; and it reiterated emphatically the crucial importance Governments, from their position of lofty responsibility, attached to cultural integration.

My delegation has requested that the Secretariat of the United Nations circulate the final document of the Cochabamba meeting to all delegations in the General Assembly.

With regard to the matter of the extraterritoriality of national laws, a most sensitive issue for peoples and Governments the world over, the Rio Group summit meeting expressed its rejection of any attempt to use a country's domestic legislation to impose unilateral sanctions of an extraterritorial character, as this contravenes the standards governing coexistence between States, disregards the fundamental principle of respect for sovereignty and is a clear violation of international law.

Bolivia is confident that intelligence and fairness will prevail on this delicate matter and that a solution will soon be found, in the interest of international coexistence and economic and commercial freedom for all peoples of the world.

One of the most outstanding international developments of our time was undoubtedly the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

With the aim of laying the groundwork for a hemispheric agenda for sustainable development, several international meetings, starting with the Summit held in Miami in 1994, have expressed support for the decision to hold a hemispheric meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, scheduled for 7 and 8 December of this year. That meeting will be a new opportunity to set the course of national and international endeavours for sustainable development in the light of economic, social and environmental goals and in reaffirmation of the importance of obtaining new and additional resources to finance the plan of action to be adopted.

Bolivia has offered to work its hardest alongside its sister nations to ensure the success of this major hemispheric event and is certain that inter-American solidarity will lead to positive results.

The agenda of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly contains more than 160 items of particular interest to the international community. My Government is prepared to participate constructively in the consideration and resolution of each of them.

We are concerned with problems of international peace and security and trust that the United Nations system will contribute effectively to finding solutions for the many parts of the world beset by conflicts and war.

As I stated on a previous occasion, Bolivia is of the view that many conflict situations can be explained by the persistence of unresolved social and national problems, as well as by the accumulation of age-old injustices and resentments; by geopolitical and economic interests that for decades have been fuelling confrontation from without and from within; and, above all, by Governments' inability to cooperate effectively so as to provide timely and peaceful solutions to the problems of greatest national concern.

We have participated in the debates on reforms of the United Nations Charter, and we believe that it is of the utmost importance to reach consensus in order to

strengthen the multilateral system in the interests of the world community. We support the positions set forth by the Non-Aligned Movement in this regard.

Difficult international circumstances are making it increasingly clear that the United Nations needs to be strengthened, to adapt its structures and strengthen the Organization as a legitimate forum for the study, coordination, follow-up and implementation of universally accepted policies. Accordingly, Bolivia considers it essential to strengthen the General Assembly, the Security Council and the role of the International Court of Justice. With regard to the expansion of the Security Council, we consider it necessary that Germany and Japan be present as new permanent members and that three other permanent members from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean be selected. The expansion should be complemented by an appropriate number of non-permanent members from the developing world. Of course, if consensus could be reached on other formulas, then other proposals, such as the one presented by Italy, would need to be considered.

With regard to the veto, Bolivia shares the view that, ideally, the international community should move towards eliminating this device — and, one would hope, in the not-too-distant future. In the meantime, use of this device should be strictly limited to actions relating to cases of threats to the peace, breach of the peace or acts of aggression referred to in Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Bolivia is greatly concerned about the political and social situation in many African countries. We express our solidarity with these countries, as we did to fraternal South Africa during its times of trial, and we urge the international community, especially the rich countries of the world, to cooperate generously and resolutely in order to cope with the grave economic problems of this continent.

We also express our solidarity with our brothers in the Middle East. We believe that the time has come to heal old wounds and frame the terms of a just and lasting peace, taking into account the need for secure borders for all and definitively resolving the situation through the creation of a Palestinian state. A solution must also be found to the questions of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, and the territorial integrity and full sovereignty of all States of the region must be preserved.

We rejoice in the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has embarked upon a new road to understanding, unity and construction of new democratic institutions.

The brotherly nations of Asia offer us remarkable examples of the possibilities and opportunities for accelerated economic development. Their successes fill us with confidence, and we are certain that they will apply the same wisdom to finding solutions to the social and political problems that some of them still face.

We are convinced that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, adopted by the General Assembly on 10 September of this year, represents a landmark along the road to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Bolivia has signed the papers of accession to the new Treaty and hopes to complete the constitutional procedures for its approval and ratification in a relatively short time.

We stress just as emphatically the need to ban the use and production of anti-personnel mines, which have been leaving a trail of blood among the peoples of the world.

The economic and social items before the Assembly also deserve our keenest interest, since they are among the essential tasks of the United Nations and of international cooperation. From our view of the international scene, questions pertaining to respect for human rights and democratic development in all countries are also matters of very high priority.

As representatives are aware, Bolivia has put forward its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 1997-1998, the elections for which will be held during the present session of the General Assembly.

As a founding member of the United Nations, Bolivia carries the principles of the Charter deep within its national spirit and has maintained a policy of recognition of and support for this universal Organization. In recent years my country has contributed to the forces of United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), as well as to the election-monitoring processes in El Salvador and Mozambique. We are also prepared to participate in United Nations standby arrangements. With regard to Haiti, Bolivia had the privilege of presiding over the ad hoc group of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of American States and contributed police personnel during the first stage of the democratic normalization of that

sister nation. Bolivia intends to continue participating in United Nations activities to foster international peace and cooperation.

In this regard, I am pleased to note that my country enjoys excellent, long-standing diplomatic relations with the five permanent members of the Security Council and that it plays an active part in the Non-Aligned Movement, whose thirty-fifth anniversary we have just celebrated in an expression of steadfastness in our convictions and in continued political cooperation.

We share common problems with developing countries, land-locked States and small States the world over. Our established friendship with all the countries of America, Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania has enabled us to learn from their important experiences and better to understand their many problems.If our brother nations represented here see fit to honour us with their trust, Bolivia undertakes to place its particular dedication at the service of the international community in the Security Council.

As we move towards the end of the twentieth century and make preparations to welcome a new century and a new millennium, peoples and nations cannot ignore deep-rooted trends towards new and untrodden systems of human coexistence.

In that connection, we must ensure that small States participate actively in the international arena in promoting mankind's dream of making one out of many. That can occur only if the rules of the game are clearly defined and implemented and if effective worldwide instruments are created. It is here, in the existence of and respect for international law and justice and the institutions that embody them, that peoples, nations and States can find the only possible lodestar to guide them. Otherwise, they will be condemned to new and ominous forms of modern slavery. That is why Bolivia believes, today more than ever, in the validity of the United Nations and will work to the utmost to defending and strengthening it.

The President: Before calling on the next speaker, I should like to inform the Assembly that the representative of Palau has requested to participate in the general debate. Inasmuch as the list of speakers was closed on Wednesday, 25 September 1996, I would ask the Assembly if there is any objection to the inclusion of that delegation in the list of speakers for the general debate? If I hear none, I shall take it that Palau is to be included in the list of speakers.

It was so decided.

The President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab.

Mr. Gurirab (Namibia): Your election, Mr. President, represents a fitting tribute to you personally for your well-known qualities as a consummate diplomat and to Malaysia for its constructive role in world affairs and remarkable success in economic development and social integration at home.

I cannot forget the skilful and decisive role you played as President of the Security Council, in defence of our interests, against attempts aimed at weakening the effectiveness of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia. Our two countries have since joined hands in cooperative relations, which are growing from strength to strength. I congratulate you and wish you every success in your challenging task.

Your Prime Minister, Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, is a great friend of the Namibian people. His eloquent voice illuminates the burning international issues advocated by the South. It also serves to define most clearly the basis of South-North dialogue, as well as the vital work being done for the developing countries by the Group of 77 and China.

Your predecessor, Mr. Diogo Feitas do Amaral, earned himself a place of honour in the annals of history by presiding over the fiftieth commemorative session of the General Assembly. I commend him for his valuable efforts and constructive contribution.

Our illustrious Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has been a devoted champion of the Charter of the United Nations, a firm reformer and an indefatigable promoter of peace, social development and peacekeeping throughout the world. Africa holds the Secretary-General in high esteem and supports his tireless efforts in behalf of peace and a better future for humanity, an outlook that is common to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the most recent OAU summit, held at Yaoundé, African leaders demonstrated unity and solidarity by endorsing Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali for reelection as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Namibia stands behind that decision.

The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations was a celebration of the success and durability of our Organization. At the same time, it was a celebration of the triumph of the will and determination of world leaders and citizens alike to conquer tyranny, hegemony, poverty, illiteracy, social inequities and underdevelopment amidst the wealth and knowledge that abound in the world.

President Nujoma had this to say last year, from this rostrum:

> "During the past 50 years, this Organization has served humanity as a universal market-place of great ideas and collective action." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 35th meeting, p. 10)*

President Nujoma has also said that the promotion of world peace and security was meant to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and, moreover, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. These are living commitments for all nations and peoples and must be realized fully. They bind us together as members of one human race and as each other's keepers.

You, Mr. President, issued a charge to the fifty-first session of the General Assembly in your acceptance speech on 17 September 1996. I thought its essence was encapsulated in these words, which seemed to echo what my leader had said:

> "The United Nations must begin to embed itself in reality and push the critical issues, especially poverty and social injustice, to the centre of national and public debate. What will it take to do this? Of immediate need is political will by Member States to commit to the principles of democracy and accountability. The nature of democratic practice needed for such an enterprise is one based on careful deliberation and consultation so that compromise to the lowest value is minimized in favour of optimizing the best options that will protect universal values." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-First Session, Plenary Meetings, first meeting, p. 4)*

I could hardly agree more with those sentiments.

I shall never be convinced, and I shall never succumb to the notion, that nuclear weapons assure world peace and security, development, prosperity or equality among nations. On the contrary, I am convinced that peace, disarmament, democracy, multilateral cooperation and resource allocation can unleash human ingenuity and industry for development and social progress.

It is for these reasons that Namibia insists on complete nuclear disarmament in all respects. The other day I signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty on behalf of the Republic of Namibia, not out of complete satisfaction but to encourage the ongoing work towards disarmament, bearing in mind the constructive and timely advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on nuclear weapons, as well as the Treaties of Pelindaba, Rarotonga and Tlatelolco, which created nuclear-free zones in Africa, the South Pacific and Latin America respectively.

Africa is bleeding, just as the souls of our people, the African people, are burning in misery and mayhem. Their precious humanity and lives have been denuded of dignity and worth. How long must this carnage and dehumanization be allowed to continue in Somalia, Burundi and other tormented places in Africa?

The glimmer of hope in Liberia engendered by the recently concluded peace accord, brokered by States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the inauguration of Mrs. Ruth Perry as the first-ever woman Head of State in Africa, must not be snatched away again by unscrupulous power-grabbers and political opportunists. Rather, the newly inaugurated Head of State must be given all the support she needs to pursue a national course of democratization, reconciliation and reconstruction for all Liberians.

The long-standing partnership and cooperation between the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations should be brought to bear in the emerging favourable situation in Liberia with a view to stabilizing the transition and to preventing any military reversals. Just as peacekeeping cannot be successful without international involvement, so also do regional post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction depend on international support to be successful. It is here where preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking come together to do good for all.

Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, the very able and hardworking Secretary-General of the OAU, is anxious to apply in all those conflict situations, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. But he is short of resources, including personnel, as well as of appropriate capacity to do the job. Namibia will

continue to make its contribution in spite of its limited means. We urge the international community to render generous assistance to the OAU for this purpose.

Drug trafficking is a horrendous killer disease which permeates the social fabric of society. Drug lords are notorious gangsters not unlike those responsible for organized crime, with corrupting inroads into Governments, businesses and civil society, targeting youth, students and even small children. The member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) recently signed a protocol on drug trafficking in our region and agreed to coordinate their law enforcement efforts to combat this menace jointly.

Today, the risk of dying due to anti-personnel landmines in many parts of the world has increased astronomically. This risk exists in southern Africa as well, mainly in Angola, but also in Mozambique and Namibia. This is another area in which SADC is combining the efforts of its members with a view to regional initiatives.

Cooperation between SADC and the European Union has made it possible for us to benefit from resources and expertise to deal more effectively with this very serious problem. That is why Namibia welcomes the initiative taken on this matter by my colleague, Mr. Klaus Kinkel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, and supports his Seven-Point-Action Programme on Anti-Personnel Mines.

In this connection, we encourage other ongoing initiatives aimed at banning anti-personnel landmines, as well as the commendable work which some countries are doing in the field of demining, including in Namibia. Namibia therefore supports the inclusion of a ban on anti-personnel landmines in the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

In the interest of democratization and national reconciliation, and in order to mitigate the existing harsh and racially biased social disparities which we inherited from the apartheid order, Namibia has been pleading with the United Nations and the rest of the international community for least-developed country status. So far, this plea has remained unheeded in the main, but, to be fair, not entirely. While renewing our plea, it is worth acknowledging with appreciation the implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/204, concerning "as if" least-developed country status, which has aided Namibia in some constructive ways. This was made possible by United Nations Member States, as well as by specialized agencies. We thank them all for their support and also for having extended the "as if" least-developed status for an additional three years.

We believe, as most do, that economic growth, job creation, human resource development and gender equality must be visible and qualitative in content as critical weapons against social dislocations and strife.

Without exception, during last year's fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the founding of the United Nations, world leaders dealt, one way or another, with the democratization, restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations. This was as it ought to be. Systemic reform of the United Nations was already overdue decades ago.

While the reform process itself is still very much on course, its forward momentum seems to have been deflected for one reason or another.

The common position shared by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Non-Aligned Movement and other fair-minded bodies and persons is based on the principle of equitable representation and transparency in terms of decision-making at all levels of our Organization.

In this context, Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean each deserve to be allocated at least two permanent seats on the Security Council, as well as a concomitant increase of non-permanent seats in the spirit of democracy and fairness. Namibia has already expressed on a number of occasions a position on the addition of Japan and Germany as permanent members of the Security Council, but not in isolation of the representation envisaged for the aforementioned three continents.

At the same time, Namibia believes that the General Assembly was not meant by the authors of the United Nations Charter to play second fiddle to any of the other principal organs. It is a universal parliament of equal members with the same preoccupation for world peace and security, as well as for human survival and prosperity.

It stands to reason, therefore, that United Nations reform must not end up by making the Assembly a rubber stamp of other principal organs, be it the Security Council or the Economic and Social Council. We should like, in the end, to see well-balanced and mutually

complementary organs and institutions of the United Nations system.

Multilateralism is the essence of the United Nations system. Decisions taken by the majority of Member States should not be changed in the interest of a few through administrative fiat. It is for the General Assembly itself, if need be, to reconsider or to change any programme activities or personnel requirements approved previously.

In addition to reaffirming their continued commitment to and strengthening, of South-South cooperation, the member States of the Group of 77 and China, in their latest report, renewed their call for a just and predictable multilateral trading system that would ensure the complete integration of the economies of the South into the world economy and the emerging international trading system.

To this end, the South attaches great importance to the first Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, to be held in Singapore in December 1996. Namibia strongly supports this meeting.

The 1993 Israeli-Palestinian peace accord and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority raised hopes for lasting peace in the Middle East. Regrettably, bloodshed and enmity are once again threatening to derail the Middle East peace process.

Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Arafat cannot afford to waste one more minute. An urgent one-on-one meeting and joint action, which ought to be routine, to end the vicious circle of violence should take place without delay. The first step in this direction is putting an immediate end to the creation of new settlements and to the reconstruction work in the Old City of Jerusalem. The initiators as well as the supporters of the Madrid peace process should also bring their weight to bear towards restoring the partnership for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, in the best interest of all parties in the Middle East, especially in the exercise of self-determination by the Palestinians and the establishment of an independent state of their own.

And, of course, we are not forgetting Bosnia. Namibia hopes that the progress achieved so far will continue and will eventually lead to lasting peace and reconciliation in the area.

Namibia cannot have a split personality on the question of self-determination and decolonization. Western Sahara is crying out for self-determination and decolonization. Only when these goals are fully realized can Africa and the United Nations boast of the complete political emancipation of our beloved continent.

Namibia welcomes the high-level contacts that the Kingdom of Morocco and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) have commenced. I should like to entreat them to maintain and invigorate these encouraging political talks. The objective we would all like to see implemented, I believe, is the early holding of a United Nations-sponsored referendum in which only the authentic Saharawis will be able to express their unfettered will and assume their destiny.

There is an extensive update on Angola in the Secretary-General's annual report. In his important statement of 23 September 1996 to this Assembly, my colleague, Venancio de Moura, Foreign Minister of Angola, provided representatives with useful additional information on the worrisome situation in his country, inclusive of constitutional and political issues.

I can hardly add to this information. For Namibia, nonetheless, the suffering of our Angolan brothers and sisters, not to mention the children, is of paramount concern. The other concern we have in Namibia is about the fast-approaching deadline of the presence of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) in Angola, which includes financial implications arising out of the obstacles and delays which keep cropping up in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol. Be that as it may, Namibia is bound by blood and common destiny to stand with Angola. That is why our military contingent attached to UNAVEM III will remain in Angola until the Mission is satisfactorily concluded.

This week, the leaders of the Southern African Development Community Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, under the co-chairmanship of President Robert Mugabe, will meet in Luanda to exchange views on the critical situation in Angola and its implications for the region, the United Nations and the world at large. President Nujoma will attend this crucial and timely meeting.

Before concluding, let me say that an enduring challenge for the United Nations, now and into the next century, is to reactivate multilateralism as the centrepiece of international relations and constructive cooperation in the emerging world order.

This new world order cannot be built with a cold war mind-set characterized by confrontation, military intervention, economic blockade and political assassinations. There is no place for it in today's world of cooperation and open trade.

The General Assembly, where all United Nations Member States are represented, is the ideal forum for resolving the conflicts of interest of the haves and the have-nots, guided by the principles of equality, justice and equity for all.

Finally, let me end with President Nujoma's concluding words, spoken here last year:

> "The future belongs to the youth and children. Our collective duty must be to reinforce their vision for a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous future in the spirit of brotherhood and cooperation". *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 35th meeting, p. 10)*

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, His Excellency Mr. Ali Alatas.

Mr. Alatas (Indonesia): It is with great pleasure that I extend my delegation's heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. We are deeply gratified to see an eminent representative of a brotherly neighbouring country and fellow member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) preside over our sessions. Your election to this high office is also a well-deserved recognition of your personal qualities and professional accomplishments, as well as of the role and stature of Malaysia in regional and global affairs.

May I also extend our felicitations to your predecessor, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, for so ably presiding over the historic fiftieth session.

Let me avail myself of this opportunity to pay tribute to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali for his many accomplishments, his untiring efforts in the cause of peace and development and the sagacity with which he is steering the Organization during these challenging times.

During the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations last year, we noted a resurgence of hope and optimism in the international community as we reviewed the achievements of the world Organization, made in spite of the many constraints with which it has been saddled. We renewed our determination to strengthen the United Nations and rededicated ourselves to the vision of world peace that inspired its founding, as well as to the ideals and principles enshrined in its Charter. That act of rededication was timely and necessary. For, since the demise of the cold war, the world has been in the grip of massive changes that have given rise to new challenges and contradictory trends in international relations. At the same time, new vistas have emerged and a deepening sense of interdependence has prompted nations to devise more realistic and more mutually beneficial patterns of cooperation.

Yet, while these developments have revived expectations of a more peaceful and secure world, the acute reality is that our planet is still far from being a peaceful place. Violent conflicts continue to embroil many regions of the globe. Nation States and international institutions are frantically struggling to adjust to drastically changed and changing political and economic circumstances. Weapons of mass destruction still pose a potent threat of worldwide catastrophe. In view of all these, it is no wonder that, after a momentary resurgence of hope, we are again being overtaken by a sense of frustration and common vulnerability.

The primordial challenge of our time, therefore, is to devise a more effective system of global governance in order to manage the demands and the vicissitudes of globalization and interdependence. As emphasized in a statement recently issued by 16 Heads of State or Government, including the President of Indonesia, nations should rise from their immediate concerns, focus on their common long-term interests and break new ground. Constructive initiatives are needed, and multilateralism has to be reasserted and strengthened.

Not even global cooperation, however, can meet the needs and expectations of people without a stronger United Nations to give coherence to such cooperation. World governance, therefore, in order to be effective and acceptable to all, must be fashioned with the United Nations as its principal mechanism and source of legitimacy. The revitalization of this international institution through a comprehensive process of restructuring and democratization of its major organs and functions has therefore become imperative.

It is of pivotal importance that the General Assembly, the highest deliberative and decision-making organ within the United Nations system, should function

effectively. Indeed, strengthening the role of the General Assembly is a basic premise of the current process of United Nations reform and revitalization.

Just as crucial is the reform of the Security Council so as to allow it to reflect contemporary realities and to accommodate the interests and concerns of developing countries, which comprise the overwhelming majority of the Organization. It is an anachronism and a gross anomaly that Europe is overrepresented, Asia underrepresented and Africa and Latin America not represented at all on the Council's roster of permanent members. In our view, new permanent members should be chosen on the basis not only of equitable geographic representation, but also of such criteria as political, economic and demographic weight, their capability and proven track record of contributing to the promotion of peace, security and development, both regionally and globally, and their commitment to assuming responsibilities inherent to permanent membership.

The Economic and Social Council is now being revitalized so that it will have a more dynamic relationship with the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies. Yet, regrettably, it is still unable effectively to fulfil its crucial role, notably in helping United Nations Members adjust to the complex demands of globalization. The reforms and adjustments that the Economic and Social Council is undergoing should be further strengthened to enhance its cooperation not only with other United Nations bodies but also with such important international agencies as the Bretton Woods institutions.

All these efforts to revitalize, reform and democratize the United Nations, however, will come to naught if in the end the United Nations is paralysed by financial insolvency. If the current financial plight of the United Nations continues — and it will continue as long as certain major Member States refuse to remit their legally-obligated contributions — there is a real danger that peacekeeping operations will collapse and many endeavours to maintain peace and security will be compromised. The very functioning of the United Nations itself could be severely undermined and the purposes of the reform process seriously jeopardized. No organization can be reformed by starving it. Ironically, the countries that are pressing the hardest for cutbacks and reforms have themselves refused to finance the new austerity budget. For more than five decades the United Nations and related institutions have been engaged in an immense array of activities that touch every aspect of people's lives all over the world. If those vital statistics, too, must be terminated because of the Organization's insolvency, that would constitute an enormous human tragedy.

Nuclear arsenals of enormously destructive power continue to pose a threat to all life on Earth. We believe that the time has come for the Conference on Disarmament to establish a special committee for negotiations on a programme of nuclear disarmament and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons within a definite time-frame. In this regard, it is my hope that the recent Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons will serve as a catalyst towards this end.

The 10 countries of South-East Asia recently made a substantive contribution to the cause of nuclear disarmament. During the historic Bangkok summit of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the seven ASEAN leaders, together with the leaders of Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, signed the Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. ASEAN is now working for the Treaty's early entry into force. We hope that the nuclear Powers will soon endorse the Treaty by acceding to its Protocol. Thus, with the conclusion of Treaties for nuclear-weapon-free zones in South-East Asia and Africa, in addition to the Antarctic, Rarotonga and Tlatelolco Treaties, a large segment of the southern hemisphere should become free of the nuclear menace. As for chemical weapons, I am pleased to inform the General Assembly that Indonesia is now at the final stage of the process of ratifying the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Another positive development was the signing a few days ago of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) after two and a half years of arduous negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. Indeed, for the past three decades, the international community unceasingly stressed the need for such a treaty in an endeavour to stem the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Treaty outlaws nuclear-test explosions by all States in all environments for all time, ensures that the ban is effective and verifiable and provides new ground for the realization of the objectives set by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Having become a reality through broad compromises, however, the Treaty is still a far cry from the CTBT long-envisioned by the international community. It still allows the most sophisticated form of

nuclear-weapon testing: simulation. In a strict sense, therefore, it is not truly comprehensive, nor does it directly address the issue of nuclear disarmament. But it does limit the nuclear-arms race by making it more difficult for countries to develop or improve their arsenals. Moreover, humankind cannot afford to dispense with the CTBT, imperfect as it may be. Our collective experience in the disarmament endeavour has been that, if we pass over an existing opportunity in favour of a better one that is yet to be, we suffer a costly delay and possibly an irretrievable setback. Having signed the Treaty on that basis, Indonesia fervently hopes that it will eventually be supported by the entire membership and thereby become an effective instrument to enable us to move towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Focal points of conflict still persist in many parts of the globe. In the Middle East, the peace process is on the verge of collapse as a highly volatile and explosive situation in the Israeli-occupied Arab territories threatens once more to engulf the region in all-too-familiar violence and bloodshed, which we had hoped had become part of the past. Israel's provocative action of opening a new entrance to the tunnel along the Western Wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque has triggered a violent confrontation, resulting in death and injuries to scores of civilians. Further aggravating the situation is the unprecedented armed clash between the Israeli army and the Palestinian police. These are but the latest manifestations of a rapid deterioration of the situation due to Israel's reneging on its previous commitments and its blatant backtracking on its obligations under the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements.

Israel must be prevailed upon to honour the Declaration of Principles and its subsequent agreements and to resume negotiations in earnest on the remaining issues and the final status of the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. Once again, we emphasize that progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of the negotiations, attended by unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon, constitutes a *conditio sine qua non* for comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

The recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, made possible by the cessation of hostilities as a result of the Dayton and Paris peace Agreements, have brought the country nearer to reconciliation and paved the way for the creation of durable national institutions.

However, we are concerned that, especially in the Serb-held areas, the results of the election may lead to the legitimizing of ethnic separation. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to ensure the unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multireligious society. For the peace Agreement to be implementable, obstructions to freedom of movement must be removed and refugees allowed freely to return to their homes. Bosnian Serb leaders must yield their illicit control over segments of the population and territory of the country. The parties to the peace Agreement must ensure that those indicted by the International Tribunal are brought to justice.

In the Gulf region, we have recently witnessed unilateral military action by extraregional Powers interfering with the internal affairs of a Member State of the United Nations. My delegation wishes to reiterate its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, in this case Iraq. Actions that are inconsistent with these basic norms and principles of inter-State relations, which are enshrined in the United Nations Charter, are clearly unacceptable. I should also like to seize this occasion to urge Iraq to comply fully with all relevant Security Council resolutions.

Earlier this month, almost a quarter of a century of conflict in the southern Philippines came to a peaceful end with the signing of a peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front, with Indonesia serving as facilitator on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Ministerial Committee of the Six. This positive development, which will bring peace and prosperity to the southern Philippines, also constitutes another important step towards the realization of a politically stable, socially cohesive and economically progressive South-East Asia that is increasingly able to deal with its own problems in its own way.

We are now living in an era of globalization and interdependence, an era replete with challenges but also full of promise. How it came about is no mystery. It had been creeping up on us for quite some time, the consequence of rapid advances in science and technology, particularly in communications and transport. The end of the cold war and the dismantling of the barriers of bloc politics and ideological contention unleashed the full force of globalization. Since then, global trade and production have been boosted to new heights while goods, people and capital are moving from one country to another more

freely than ever. Globalization has thus raised the hopes of humankind with visions of a new world of opportunities and more equitable prosperity.

These hopes are not without foundation. In a global economy that is gradually recovering from recession, the developed countries, according to the 1996 Economic and Social Survey, have shown average gross-national-product growth rates of two per cent. The developing countries have registered a significant 6 per cent growth while the economic dynamos of East and South-East Asia have been credited with a stunning 8 per cent growth. These are the trade-driven economies that have benefited most from globalization.

Yet, the apprehensions about globalization are equally justified. In an external environment over which developing countries have very little control, globalization could widen the prosperity gap between the developed and the developing countries. The fact that globalization can also lead to disaster was demonstrated not too long ago when the global operations of financial markets led to instability and volatility that sent shock waves through the monetary systems of developing countries. In their efforts to integrate themselves into the global economy, many developing countries have found it necessary to make structural adjustments that too often entail exorbitant social and human costs. Moreover, globalization has not mitigated and may have, on the contrary, exacerbated the inequities and imbalances in international economic relations. Bereft of a favourable external environment for their national development efforts, many developing countries continue to languish in poverty, backwardness, stagnation and even negative economic growth. Every year, 13 to 18 million people, mostly children in developing countries, die from hunger and poverty-related causes. Meanwhile, the developing countries remain marginalized from the international decision-making processes that would fashion global solutions to the global economic problems that afflict them.

The poignant experience of the past three and a half decades teaches us that these problems cannot be solved through palliatives and piecemeal reforms. Since the major problems of development are global in nature, they can only be effectively dealt with through a new global partnership for development involving all countries, of both the developed North and the developing South, on the basis of mutual interest and equitable sharing of benefits and responsibility.

It has been more than two years since the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, but the promise of an equitable, transparent and rule-based multilateral trading system, as embodied in the World Trade Organization (WTO), has yet to be realized. Moreover, we are alarmed at the tendency of some developed countries to resort to a new form of protectionism in the guise of linking labour standards and other social and environmental concerns to trade. Such efforts will not only harm the developing countries, but will also ultimately debilitate the WTO itself. We therefore call upon all trading partners to refrain from overloading the agenda of the first Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Singapore this coming December with issues extraneous to trade. Let us together nurture the WTO as the guardian of a predictable, non-discriminatory multilateral trading system and the guarantor of the rights of the weaker trading partner against unilateral and arbitrary actions by the strong.

In this context, we share the concern expressed by the international community at the practice of some countries of promulgating national laws with extraterritorial application that adversely impact on the legitimate interests of other countries. We cannot accept the imposition of the law of the strong in place of dialogue and negotiation. No one country, no matter how powerful, should be allowed unilaterally to regulate the lives of other sovereign countries.

The biggest single deterrent to development in many of the world's poorest countries is the crushing effect of their debt burdens. Indonesia has long advocated a set of principles for managing the debt problem, calling for a "once-and-for-all" settlement of the debt problems of developing countries, including multilateral debts, as well as the cancellation of the debts of the most severely affected, low-income developing countries. In this context, we welcome and support the joint proposal of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which offers effective alternatives for reducing the overall debt burdens of heavily indebted poor countries to sustainable levels. While this initiative could be further refined, it is Indonesia's fervent hope that, at the forthcoming meetings of the World Bank and the IMF, this proposal will finally receive the support that it needs and deserves from the developed countries. In this context, I am encouraged by the developments at the IMF meetings in Washington today.

Social development and social justice remain elusive dreams for millions of impoverished people throughout

the world. Indonesia shares that dream and abides by the commitments it assumed at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, both of which were held last year. We have indeed dedicated ...

Mr. Turnquest (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We have, indeed, dedicated ourselves to the proposition that people should not only be the beneficiaries of development but should also be given every opportunity to become the authors of their own development. At the same time we should address, through concrete and concerted international action, the problem of the global trade in illicit drugs and other forms of transnational crime. Above all, we must continue to address the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, and we must commit ourselves fully to genuine partnership.

This century that is about to end will perhaps be remembered for both the cruelty of its wars and the tremendous achievements that it has seen in science and technology — although it is not for these achievements that we should be proud of it. To my mind, what makes this century special is the fact that during this time the human race truly began to nurture the idea that poverty is not an inevitable part of the human condition, but that it can be conquered and wiped off the face of the Earth. We have the natural resources and the mental and organizational capacity to succeed at that task. The question has always been whether we have the political will to do it, and whether we are concerned and enlightened enough to form an equitable global partnership for development — for a concerted struggle against poverty that will give a deeper and brighter meaning to globalization and interdependence. The answer, I believe, is largely in the hands of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Benin, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Osho.

Mr. Osho (Benin) (*interpretation from French*): Like the speakers who have preceded me at this rostrum, I wish to extend to you, Sir, the warm and sincere congratulations of the delegation of Benin to the President on his unanimous selection to preside over the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. This choice constitutes clear recognition of his exceptional personal qualities and his wealth of experience as a seasoned diplomat, and it is a collective tribute to his beautiful country, Malaysia, whose dynamism and outstanding economic success over the past few years I salute. From the rostrum of this Assembly, I should like to make a contribution to this important session by expressing a message of peace, solidarity, faith and hope from the people and the Government of Benin.

A year ago, in this very Hall, in commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary, the United Nations hosted the greatest gathering of Heads of State in history. In this setting they carried out a critical, objective and unsparing assessment of the 50 years of the Organization's existence, a period during which international cooperation made it possible to achieve significant progress on each of the principles enshrined in the Charter. In the Declaration they adopted, the Heads of State and Government solemnly reaffirmed their dedication to the great ideals of peace, development and democracy inscribed in the founding texts of the Organization.

Given this commitment by world leaders on the threshold of a new millennium, the imperative of peace must, more than ever, remain the ultimate goal of the international community as a whole. This is all the more urgent because, despite the end of the cold war, the peace and security of nations seem far from being fully assured. Indeed, in many respects, on the political and security level the international situation remains worrying, especially on the African continent, where the course of history too often bears the imprint of tragic events to which the international community cannot remain indifferent.

The resurgence of conflicts which, for the most part, no longer take place between States but within nations, is a challenge for which the Organization must adopt new methods and machinery for intervention and settlement. This means, therefore, that to be able to promote harmonious relations among the peoples of the world and to guarantee a lasting peace, our shared Organization must strengthen its capabilities and its means in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and the consolidation of peace. It cannot be stressed enough that, despite the difficulties, inadequacies and gaps that reduce or restrict the scope and effectiveness of its actions, the United Nations represents, embodies and remains — today and, doubtless, for a long time to come — the body that can best express and bring to a successful conclusion the will of Member States to work for the consolidation of peace and the pursuit of economic and social progress.

Despite the new international situation that promotes less aggressive, less suspicious and less tense relations between States, the political instability that continues to exist in certain parts of Africa, and the conflicts that develop there, have become significant barriers to the economic recovery and social cohesion of the continent. In this context, I wish to refer to the very worrying situation in Burundi, where the unjust system of socio-ethnic relations, military intransigence and political intolerance pointlessly prolong the suffering and division of a people. It is deplorable that on 25 July 1996 a military coup ended, by force, Burundi's constitutional, democratic and legal institutions.

My country, Benin, welcomes the strong and courageous reaction of the countries of the subregion and encourages their efforts for a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the crisis in Burundi.

Benin supports the efforts of the Heads of State of countries of the Great Lakes region and of the Organization of African Unity to make the new authorities in Burundi quickly embark on negotiations and abide by decisions which should result from constructive and sound concerted action on the part of the healthy forces of this battered people. The various protagonists must understand that only a new political agreement, based on ordinary common sense, with respect for the intangible principles of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, will contribute to an acceptable solution to all.

Regarding the situation in Liberia, the summit meeting of the Committee of Nine on Liberia of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held on 17 August 1996, took important decisions to extend the Abuja Agreements of 1995, which are rightly considered to be the appropriate legal framework for a definitive settlement of the conflict. This last Abuja summit also drew up a new timetable for the implementation of the peace process, and defined the modalities and stages to lead to democratic elections. Benin urgently demands that the Liberian factions take advantage of this last opportunity and strictly abide by the Abuja decisions, in order to speed up the return of their country to normality.

My country also invites the international community to support the efforts of ECOWAS by stepping up its financial and logistical assistance for the successful implementation of the Abuja decisions.

The most important thing for a nation in crisis is the search for compromise to settle internal contradictions, no matter how serious they are. This truth has been tried and tested elsewhere, in Mozambique for example, and recently in Angola, the results of which we note with satisfaction. Hence the appeal which I am renewing here, before this Assembly, for sincere dialogue in Rwanda, Somalia, the Sudan, Sierra Leone, the Middle East — in a word, wherever passions continue at the end of the twentieth century to cloud reason and block the genuine struggle for development and democracy.

Everyone agrees that peace, if it is to be genuine and lasting, must be based on general and complete disarmament under international control. Here, I should like to say how gratified Benin is at the signature of the Pelindaba Treaty for the establishment of an African nuclear-weapon-free zone.

The Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), held from 17 April to 12 May 1995, decided to renew the Treaty indefinitely, thus opening the way to better prospects in the area of nuclear disarmament. Benin, which has worked for this, believes in the strengthening of the provisions of the Treaty, in particular regarding the verification regime, in order to make it a genuine international instrument for effective nuclear disarmament and a solid basis for more fruitful international cooperation in the area of the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

While the commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament has been gaining ground throughout the globe, the resumption or continuation of nuclear tests painfully reminded us of the dangers and horrors which haunted the collective psyche of nations during the cold-war period. This is why Benin can only welcome the positive decision taken by France and recently by the People's Republic of China to put an end to their nuclear testing programmes.

The signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty during the present session will most certainly mark a major stage in the achievement of an objective which is decisive, even vital, for the international community: that of disarmament and non-proliferation.

As we can read in the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations,

> "action to ensure peace, security and stability in the world will be futile unless the economic and social needs of people are addressed." (*resolution 50/6, para. 1*)

This means that peace comes to nothing if the imperative of development is not guaranteed. Here, it is important to emphasize that many countries in Africa have made considerable progress in the key areas of protecting mothers and their children, of health, of nutrition and of education, but, from one end of the continent to the other, gains continue to be drastically limited as a result of endemic poverty and economic regression.

Recent developments in the global economy and the serious obstacles encountered by the efforts of the developing countries, particularly the least-developed countries, are a cause of profound concern for us as Africans.

The accelerated globalization of the rules and practices of the system of market economies has led to the emergence of a new economic order within which Africa, for the most part, remains marginalized. The agreements of the Uruguay Round concluded in 1994, the rapid redefinition of economic groupings in the developed countries, and the ever more important role of private capital in the world economy, have created a new international environment in which the interests of Africa do not seem to have been taken into account, or in which they are even threatened or compromised.

While it is true that socio-economic development in Africa is first of all the responsibility of the peoples and Governments of the African countries themselves, it none the less remains true that the international community, in particular its most developed and industrialized members, must do their part, a part commensurate with their true means, in the development process of a continent involved in a dual economic and political transition.

At a time when one has reason to fear the resurgence of national selfishness, the temptations of protectionism and of isolationism, the international community should provide a clear response, a concrete solution that can be rapidly applied to the problems experienced by the developing world, in particular Africa. These well-known problems include the burden of foreign debt, the alarming reduction in capital flows, the trend toward a decline in official development assistance, the weak rate of investment, the continued imbalance in the terms of trade — despite the devaluation of the CFA Franc in January 1994 — protectionism on export markets, continued weak commodities prices, and so on.

We have every right to be pleased that over the last five years, the struggle to eradicate poverty has been a prominent issue in negotiations and the drafting of declarations and programmes of action adopted by summits and conferences organized under the auspices of the United Nations.

As we approach the end of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the beginning next year, 1997, of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, new national and international efforts must be made to mobilize the vast resources needed to eliminate poverty.

In addition, as the decisions and recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) are implemented, they will be tangible assets for present and future generations in the process of building a more human and better society through exercise of the right to adequate housing for all.

Environmental protection is essential if we are to promote sustainable development. Faced with the threat to mankind posed by the rise in sea levels, global warming, creeping desertification and the disappearance of biological diversity, Benin attaches the utmost importance to implementation of all the agreements reached in Rio and, here, renews its commitment to doing all it can to ensure the success of the special session of the General Assembly planned for June 1997 to strengthen implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Earth Summit contained in Agenda 21. In accordance with the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992 in Rio, by the end of the year Benin will have adopted its own national Agenda 21 and, at the same time, will begin drawing up local Agendas 21.

In the context of the effective implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention to Control Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the Government of Benin held a national forum from 20 to 22 August 1996 which was the starting point for the process of drawing up its national programme of action to combat desertification through a partnership of Government, local populations, non-governmental

organizations, development associations, the private sector and development partners.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the interim secretariat of the Convention and, above all, the Government of Germany and the United Nations Development Programme, whose technical and financial support proved decisive in the holding of this successful forum.

It is regrettable that five years after it was launched, the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s has not had the expected impact on the development of Africa even though the priorities our States opted for were largely in line with its objectives, including in the area of democratic and macroeconomic reforms.

This is why Benin welcomes the launching by the Secretary-General on 15 March 1996 of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, an initiative that complements the New Agenda and provides it with new impetus. I should like here to reaffirm Benin's adherence to this Initiative whose objectives fit perfectly with those of our national development plans. Implementation of the priority actions of the Initiative require the mobilization of Africans themselves, bodies of the United Nations system and Africa's development partners to ensure ambitious, concerted and coordinated action designed to lead to tangible results in Africa.

We applaud the initiatives of the United Nations system which has long been working for the development of Africa, as well as the actions of all partners for the development of Africa, including France and Japan, which have made the development and economic recovery of Africa a priority.

We appeal to all Member States diligently to implement the results of the mid-term review of United Nations New Agenda in order to accelerate the process of strengthening the effective integration of Africa into the international trading system, help Africa diversify its economy and encourage direct foreign investment.

Along the same lines, The Agenda for Development, which Benin actively helped to draft, should be effectively implemented to achieve the development objectives of developing countries, the least-developed countries in particular.

Massive and persistent human rights violations are today both source and consequence of ethnic, racial and religious tensions which continue to persist in certain parts of the globe, particularly on our continent, Africa. The Government of Benin considers that all States, whatever their political system, their economic level and their culture, have a duty to promote, protect and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, Benin reaffirms its deep commitment to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, whose promotion and protection are a legitimate concern of the international community.

For our part, we in Benin have continued to strive to consolidate our new democratic experience which has been in place since the historic National Conference of Active Forces of the Nation in February 1990.

I know that all members have been following with interest, and are well informed about, the deep-seated qualitative changes in the political life of Benin and I wish to take advantage of this opportunity to thank everyone for the genuine interest with which they have followed our major political event: the recent presidential election in March 1996, in which we could see a peaceful and orderly democratic transfer of power, without violence or bloodshed, which was totally in keeping with the rule of constitutional law in force since December 1990. The generally correct and normal conduct of the ballot, the peaceful behaviour of the vast majority of our political classes, the courageous and responsible attitude of the people of Benin and the unwavering stance taken continually by the Constitutional Court are all signs which demonstrate genuine political maturity and an irrevocable commitment to building a truly democratic society in the Republic of Benin.

To complete its programme of building a State based on the rule of law and a prosperous nation in which all citizens of Benin would enjoy a certain minimum standard of living, the Government of Benin wishes to benefit further from the support and assistance of the entire international community. We are well aware of the fact that merely going through the motions of an election is not enough to install and guarantee lasting democracy in a country.

For democracy to have real meaning and for a people to fully enjoy the freedom and salvation it brings, it must be expressed both on the national and international levels. This means that democracy must also underlie and govern the organization and conduct of international relations. The world, so long divided by East-West antagonism and by North-South imbalances,

can and must conceive and implement new, democratic relations among States. Here it is no exaggeration to say that the renewal of the United Nations begun thanks to the courageous, tenacious and fruitful actions of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali must be resolutely sustained and developed to guarantee the conditions necessary for the harmonious pursuit of the process of democratization in international society on the eve of the twenty-first century. The delegation of Benin is convinced that our present deliberations on all issues of reform of the Organization will be guided by our shared determination to take concerted, specific and realistic measures which, better than in the past, respond to the great stakes and challenges emerging on the horizon of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, His Excellency Mr. Josef Zieleniec.

Mr. Zieleniec (Czech Republic): Let me congratulate Ambassador Razali on his election to the office of President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly and wish him all the best in that challenging post. I would also like to thank the outgoing President, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, for the outstanding manner in which he conducted the work of the previous session.

A year ago, many world leaders gathered here to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and, in particular, to discuss its future prospects. No one questioned its importance as a worldwide forum for dealing with important global problems. Based on the principle of universality, it should be open to all those who are willing and ready to participate in this endeavour.

But as it enters the second half-century of its existence, the United Nations faces increasing, ever more complex and often even conflicting demands. Its response has often been to try to do everything, eventually watering down its energies and drive, thus contributing to a perception of declining efficiency. It should in fact focus only on what it does best: maintaining international peace and security, promoting respect for human rights, providing development assistance and alleviating human suffering.

We therefore believe that a critical stage in its reform should consist of setting out clear-cut priorities for United Nations action. There are areas where the United Nations holds a competitive advantage, where it can act more efficiently than individual States or regional organizations, and where it has proven its ability to achieve more cost-effective and rapid results than other entities.

Reform is no longer a subject for discussion. Action is needed. Significant steps in the right direction have, of course, already been taken. We have noted with satisfaction the gradual downsizing of the Secretariat in the past several years and the adoption of a no-growth budget for the current period. Similar efforts by specialized agencies have furthermore included moves towards their better coordination. We welcome the establishment of an Efficiency Board within the Secretariat.

Though reform is well under way, the current system is still hindered by overlapping mandates and duplication in the work of various United Nations bodies and specialized agencies. Departments within secretariats suffer from insufficient coordination and oversight mechanisms, unclear priorities and bureaucratic procedures. Intense reflection on these matters is taking place in various United Nations bodies. The Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has discussed rationalizing the General Assembly's methods and organization of its work, streamlining its agenda and reshaping its subsidiary machinery, as well as reforming the structures and functioning of the Secretariat. We hope that some of these ideas will mature enough to be presented as formal recommendations to the General Assembly.

The financial situation of the United Nations continues to be critical, in spite of a reduction in peacekeeping activities. In our view, there are two main causes of this situation: the present method of assessing contributions and arrears.

On the first point, we believe that a new scale of assessments should be developed that would equitably reflect the economic circumstances of individual Member States and their capacity to pay, based primarily on gross national product (GNP) indicators. On the second point, it is essential that Member States fulfil their financial obligations in full, on time and without conditions. Certain incentives and disincentives should be adopted to encourage Member States to honour their financial commitments. These measures, however, should not be applied to Members unable to pay for reasons beyond their control.

The Czech Republic fully associates itself with the European Union's package of financial proposals. I recall

also that our share of peacekeeping operations has not been determined yet. We take this issue very seriously and have made certain specific proposals to resolve it.

Security Council reform has attracted extremely wide attention. As I mentioned in 1995, we support an increase in both permanent and non-permanent seats while insisting on safeguarding rapid and effective Council action. Yet the more members it has, the more its effectiveness will be hindered. In our view, therefore, only a modest expansion is feasible. We oppose new categories of membership.

The criteria for new permanent members should include their level of commitment to maintaining peace, to promoting development and to meeting their financial obligations to the United Nations. We believe Germany and Japan are suitable candidates, and support an expanded representation of Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The second aspect of Security Council reform relates to its working methods. Several proposals have been submitted, including the Czech one, on a broader interpretation of Article 31 of the United Nations Charter. The proposals submitted include a number of points acceptable to the overwhelming majority of Member States. We regret that the Working Group on the Security Council has not yet reached consensus on any of them. We believe that issues not requiring amendments to the Charter should be resolved separately from those that would. We will pursue our efforts in this respect and strive for some agreement next year.

Having been elected to the Economic and Social Council and having assumed the post of its Vice-President, we have taken on a fair share of responsibility for its work. We strongly support reform efforts to restructure the Council and to enhance its efficiency and its coordinating role. It should more adequately reflect the new world economic and social situation. We believe that the Council's position within the United Nations system should be strengthened and its procedures streamlined. It should provide policy guidance for development activities and become the supreme steering and coordinating body for all United Nations-based programmes that fall under its purview.

Restructuring its functional commissions is a key aspect of its reform. Regional economic commissions should play a more yisible role. Upgrading development cooperation with Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization is another challenge for the Economic and Social Council. To reduce duplication with the General Assembly, the Council should pass on to the Assembly only those issues that it does not have the power to decide by itself. On the other hand, the General Assembly should strike from its agenda those items that are fully within the Council's authority.

Although the Czech Republic's two-year term on the Security Council expired at the end of 1995, we continue to pay attention to the conflicts and other events that endanger world peace and security.

The Dayton peace process gave a chance to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the other countries involved. The September 1996 elections constituted a milestone on the road to a lasting peace in the Balkans. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe performed its election task in an outstanding manner. We applaud all those who participated in those elections.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the election results reconfirmed ethnic divisions in the country. It will not be easy for the parties to overcome this problem. The international community should therefore remain alert and continue in its peaceful engagement by committing the necessary troops and by exerting political pressure on all the parties to keep up the momentum of the Dayton peace process. Local elections, to be held in November, are the next step in this process. It is important that all planned political institutions be formed and start functioning as soon as possible.

Another area of deep interest to us is the Middle East. As a participant in the multilateral talks on peace and economic cooperation in the Middle East and as one of the donor States in the area, we have consistently voiced our full support for the continuation of the peace process based on a just and comprehensive solution of the issues. We do so again today with renewed urgency in view of the recent tragic events in Jerusalem.

Security and stability in the Gulf region are important to the Czech Republic. We support all efforts to solve the tense situation concerning Iraq. Iraq must comply unconditionally with all relevant Security Council resolutions in order for sanctions to be lifted and for Iraq to return to the international community. At the same time, the territorial integrity of Iraq must be preserved. We look forward to a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi issue. For humanitarian reasons we hope that Security

Council resolution 986 (1995) is implemented as soon as conditions permit.

Despite geographical distance, we are deeply concerned by conflicts in African countries, such as Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi. My country supports United Nations efforts to rid these countries of war and suffering, which, besides engendering violence, further widen the gap between developed countries and these often desperately poor countries.

The Czech Republic intends to contribute to international stability and economic development. Domestically, we laid the foundations for this policy by strengthening our democratic institutions and by reforming our economy. Internationally, this effort was endorsed last December when the Czech Republic was admitted to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For my Government, OECD membership amounts also to a serious commitment to share the knowledge and experience of the Czech people with other countries and to provide development assistance.

Solid domestic results are also a precondition for membership in the European Union and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These regional arrangements are vital for Europe's security structure. Through membership in NATO, the Czech Republic intends to contribute to Europe's security and stability. The decision on our membership will be made by NATO members and by our country. Russia's participation in discussions on European security is, of course, critical, and we understand the need for a strategic partnership between NATO and the Russian Federation. These discussions, however, should not precondition the process of NATO enlargement.

Peacekeeping is an important tool in the hands of the Security Council. However, it has its limits, in so far as hostilities often occur within States. These limits are dictated by the principles of impartiality, the non-use of force — except in self-defence — and consent of the parties. Following United Nations experiences in Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and, most recently, in Liberia, unwarranted enthusiasm concerning peacekeepers has evaporated.

The Czech Republic has been actively participating in United Nations peacekeeping. We support the establishment of stand-by arrangements and intend to participate in the system aimed at expanding United Nations capacities to deploy its forces. My country's participation in the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina is our current major effort devoted to peace. The United Nations does not have peace-enforcement instruments of its own, but regional arrangements are often useful in enforcing peace. Our IFOR experience only confirms this. Last year we signed the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and we anticipate its early ratification. We hope that it will enter into force soon.

The fifth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) reconfirmed the elimination of nuclear weapons as its ultimate goal. Concluding the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty represents a significant step in this direction, and we intend to sign the Treaty very shortly. It is disturbing however, that the Conference on Disarmament did not reach consensus on this question and that the Treaty was not adopted unanimously. Every effort should be made to achieve universality of NPT membership. Perhaps the most important task is the implementation of Article VI of the Treaty. The role of the Conference on Disarmament in this process is irreplaceable and will take on even more importance, as the Conference is expected to deal with another growing problem that we want to help resolve — the elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

Matters of security have long ceased to be only matters of armies and weapons. The devastating social damage done by drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking threaten the entire international community. Close international cooperation in tackling the drug menace should be our response to this dangerous challenge.

International terrorism is another source of great concern. The international community must stand united to suppress it. It is the responsibility of each State to fight terrorism and to strictly apply and abide by all international instruments in this field. We appeal to States that have not ratified the appropriate conventions to do so without delay and to implement them.

The Czech Government attaches great importance to the promotion of human rights and in particular to United Nations activities in this field. An environment that upholds human rights is our best protection as individuals and as a society. We defend human rights because it is in our own best interest. This year the Czech Republic has been elected to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. As a member of the Commission, we

intend to contribute actively to its work and to meet the objectives of the international community in this field.

President Havel is one of the 16 Heads of State or Government who have recently issued a statement on reviving multilateralism. The statement voices deep concern over the lack of progress, both in pace and in scope, of multilateral renewal. Nations must either move forward to reform and strengthen the United Nations system, or we risk facing a weakened solidarity, more unilateralism and perhaps conflict and overt disregard of international law and human values. Multilateral diplomacy goes well beyond the United Nations itself. Regional cooperation is crucial to strengthening global cooperation. Without a stronger United Nations, however, other forms of international cooperation will lose coherence.

The Acting President: I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen, His Excellency Mr. Abdulkarim Al-Eryany.

Mr. Al-Eryany (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is a pleasure for me to warmly congratulate Mr. Razali on his election to the presidency of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. We are sure that his extensive experience and political sophistication will make a significant contribution to the success of its work. I should like also to express my thanks and appreciation to his predecessor for his judicious management of the work of the General Assembly during its last session.

I would like to take this opportunity to express once more my country's appreciation of the role played by the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and of his sincere, invaluable efforts to strengthen the role of the Organization in keeping abreast of international events and developments to the benefit of all humanity and in order to preserve international peace and security. On behalf of Yemen, I would also like to express my country's support for the re-election of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali for a second term as Secretary-General so he can continue the comprehensive restructuring of the United Nations, which will enable it to play a significant and fundamental role responsive to the demands of the twenty-first century.

As this session is being held, new and dangerous developments are taking place, threatening peace and security in the Middle East. The situation in Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has exploded as a result of the aggressive unjustified actions and harsh practices undertaken by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people, and their continued attempts to change the character of Holy Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The most recent of these attempts was Israel's opening of a tunnel linking Al-Borac Square and Al-Mujahidin Street near Bab Al-Asbat, threatening the integrity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and other Islamic monuments. During the last few days, the Israeli army and police force have used various kinds of weapons and live ammunition against unarmed Palestinian protesters. These clashes have caused the death or injury of hundreds of innocent Palestinians.

We strongly condemn and denounce the actions and practices of the Israeli military forces and their repeated acts of aggression against Palestinian officials and citizens in Arab Al-Quds and other Palestinian towns, which have led to the death and injury of hundreds of people. The terrorism and oppression carried out by the Israeli occupying authority constitute a gross violation of human rights, legitimate international resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to occupied territories. This critical development can only exacerbate the situation and return the region to a cycle of tension and violence. It threatens peace and security not only in the Middle East region but in the whole world.

This year, the Republic of Yemen celebrated the sixth anniversary of its unification, achieved after successfully overcoming all the difficulties and challenges in the way of unity and development. These celebrations coincided with preparations for voter registration for the second parliamentary elections since the reunification of our country, which are to be held in April 1997 reinforcing democracy in our country. Our democratic approach is demonstrated by our political pluralism, and our respect for human rights and freedom of the press, and will enable us to achieve qualitative changes in the economic, social and political life of Yemeni citizens.

Today the Republic of Yemen is enjoying stability, a democratic process and economic reforms, which must enjoy the encouragement and support of the international community since this democratic process will contribute to the strengthening of security and stability at the local and regional levels.

At the same time, our people are in the midst of a difficult and important battle for social and economic development and modernization and for the elimination of backwardness. Some of the most serious problems we face as a developing country are inflation, the increase in the rates of population growth and their effects on the growth rate of the national economy. In order to deal

with that, the Government has adopted a programme of economic, financial and administrative reforms in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development with the aim of correcting economic, financial and structural imbalances. This has been done to achieve balance and stability in the economy as a whole and to activate the role of the private sector on the basis of a market economy and free competition, while taking into account the importance of improving basic essential social services, building a modern State and improving the standard of living of citizens.

Efforts by the Yemeni Government to implement this programme have yielded improvements and have had notable success, especially in preventing the collapse of the local currency, reducing the rate of inflation and achieving a positive growth rate. However, it has proved difficult to alleviate suffering in the social sphere. These difficulties have been compounded by the disastrous floods which plagued Yemen last June, causing extensive, grave losses of life and property. These affected some parts of the infrastructure and harmed many people. Agricultural land was eroded and livestock was destroyed. Houses, roads, bridges, health centres, sources of drinking water and schools in many areas of the Republic of Yemen were all destroyed. These losses and damages were a major disaster and economic setback for Yemen.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew my call for international and humanitarian organizations and fraternal and friendly Governments to provide help and support to overcome the disastrous effects of the floods. I would also like to thank all those organizations and Governments that have responded and offered support for and solidarity with the people of Yemen in their ordeal.

The Republic of Yemen, in the framework of its political orientation, is pursuing a foreign policy based on mutual respect and the common interests of States. It therefore stresses the importance of maintaining security, stability and cooperation among all States in the region. In this regard, demarcation of the border between our country and the fraternal Sultanate of Oman has been definitively concluded through a dialogue based upon mutual interests, equitable treatment and respect for the rights of both countries. This achievement represents a significant positive step that will serve security and stability in the region and deepen trust between the two countries. Similarly, our country is working with the same sincerity and credibility to settle the issue of the border with the fraternal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the basis of mutual interests and in the light of the Taif Agreement and the contents of the memorandum of understanding signed by the two countries on 26 February 1995 in the Holy City of Mecca.

Pursuant to this, joint committees have been formed to discuss the border issue, its demarcation, the development of all aspects of cultural, trade and economic relations and the strengthening of cooperation between the two fraternal countries.

Moreover, a security agreement was signed on 27 July 1996 that emphasized the concerns of both countries for their joint security and to combat terrorism, exchange security information and strengthen cooperation between their institutions, thus giving concrete form to the spirit of the 1934 Taif Treaty and the memorandum of understanding signed on 26 February 1995. An agreement on technical, investment, trade and economic cooperation was also signed.

The Republic of Yemen has shown a sincere desire and strong political will and has made continuous efforts to address the matter of the Eritrean occupation in mid-December 1995 of the Yemeni island of Hanish al-Kabir in the Red Sea. While negotiations were taking place between the two countries aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement that would respect legal, historical and geographical rights, our country did not opt for the use of force. From the very first day, we stressed the necessity of using peaceful means, dialogue through mediators and international arbitration in order to spare the two neighbouring peoples the scourges of war and conflict, in keeping with its belief in the principles and purposes of the United Nations and its commitment to the provisions of the Charter. Accordingly, an agreement of principles between Yemen and Eritrea was officially signed in Paris on 21 May 1996. This was the fruit of French, Egyptian and Ethiopian mediation efforts and of the support of our Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. This agreement was a sound basis on which to settle peacefully the dispute between the two countries regarding issues of territorial sovereignty and maritime borders. On this basis, discussions have begun on special arbitration measures and the mechanism to be used with a view to starting the process as soon as possible. It is unfortunate that, despite all these procedures, Eritrea took new action on the island of Hanish af-Saghir on 10 August 1996. This act violated the agreement of principles and created an atmosphere of tension and conflict in the region, threatening stability,

security and the safety of international shipping in the region.

Now that Eritrea has withdrawn its forces from the island of Hanish af-Saghir and the crisis has passed, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation for the role played and efforts made by France and its special envoy, and the positions of the Secretary-General and the President and members of the Security Council, and to all those fraternal and friendly States that declared their support for the principles agreed upon for resolving the conflict peacefully through arbitration. Finally, my country would like to stress that a peaceful settlement is the proper way to improve relations between Yemen and Eritrea and to promote the trust necessary to creating an atmosphere conducive to the development of relations between the two countries and the peoples of Yemen and Eritrea.

The civil war in Somalia has gone beyond the bounds of reason and, as our country is a neighbour of fraternal Somalia, we have found ourselves shouldering the burden of receiving and housing tens of thousands of refugees. We have also cooperated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and non-governmental organizations in sheltering and feeding the Somali refugees, although this is a heavy burden on our country and compounds its existing economic and social ills.

We are deeply disturbed by the continuing fragmentation, fighting and uncertainty in Somalia. The Republic of Yemen considers that the responsibility for solving the refugee problem, which is a social and economic burden of significant proportions, and the solution of the Somali problem lie with the Somalis themselves. On that basis, we urge the Somali leadership once again to demonstrate greater political will and a genuine desire to reach a final settlement for peace and stability in their country and to engage in dialogue in order to save their people, rebuild their country and give the refugees the opportunity to return to their homes and resettle. In order to facilitate this, Yemen has received a number of Somali leaders and made every effort to assist the Somalis themselves to reach a national accord acceptable to all. We hope these efforts will be successful. The achievement of national reconciliation in Somalia and the improvement of security and stability in that country and the entire Horn of Africa are at the forefront of our concerns, embodying our historical and strategic relationships, which are inextricably intertwined with all the States of the region.

In view of the Republic of Yemen's positive support for the peace process in the Middle East, which began with the Madrid Conference in October 1991, guaranteeing a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of legitimate international resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and subsequent agreements and protocols in this regard, and on the basis of the principle of land for peace and guarantees of complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, we once again emphasize the necessity for a lasting, just and comprehensive peace as the basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region. Only this can ensure that the root causes of violence and extremism will be destroyed and that the values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and civilized cooperation among peoples will be promoted.

Accordingly, we would like to express our concern about the resumption of the Israeli policy of settlement on Palestinian land, especially around the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Israelis are establishing settlements, destroying Palestinian houses, building bypass roads for Israeli settlers, continuing the blockade of Palestinian lands and refusing to redeploy Israeli forces out of Hebron. These Israeli practices constitute blatant violations of agreements and pledges made between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and can only exacerbate tensions and return the peace process to its starting point, possibly even derailing the entire process.

We therefore stress the importance of making rapid progress towards a final settlement leading to restoration of the Palestinians' legitimate rights, particularly the rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the basic principles underlying the Madrid Conference. Negotiations on the basis of those principles and with all parties respecting their commitments should be conducted on all tracks.

The peace process is currently facing risks and challenges that are preventing it from achieving its aims. Israel is deliberately dragging its feet and is persistent in its procrastination over negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic on the basis of the agreements reached by both parties under the previous Israeli Government. Among the most important of these was the obligation to withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the principle of "land for peace". We stress the need for Israel to respect the

sovereignty and independence of fraternal Lebanon, release Lebanese prisoners and detainees from Israeli concentration camps and acknowledge its responsibility to compensate Lebanon for the losses it has sustained as a result of the continuing Israeli acts of aggression against its land and people.

A just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, together with security and stability in the region, can be achieved only if every State of the region fulfils its obligations equally and through the establishment of a nuclear-, biological- and chemical-weapon-free zone in the region. Israel must ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and submit its nuclear installations to the international inspection regime as a step towards establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and freeing the area from the threat of all weapons of mass destruction. In this context, we would like to express our satisfaction at the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty at the beginning of this session. Yemen will sign the Treaty today.

While Yemen stresses the importance of Iraq's total compliance with resolutions of the international community and its continuing cooperation with the United Nations, we would also stress the need to preserve the unity, territorial sovereignty and integrity of Iraq. We also express our great concern about and condemnation of any action in this regard affecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and appeal for the alleviation of the suffering of the Iraqi people. We therefore welcome the memorandum of understanding signed in May 1996 between Iraq and the United Nations on the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995), providing for the sale of petroleum for the purchase of food as a first step towards alleviating the terrible suffering of the fraternal Iraqi people.

We call upon the international community and the Security Council to pursue the lifting of the air blockade and other measures imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya pursuant to Security Council resolutions and to respond to the resolutions and proposals of regional organizations. The most recent of these was the initiative put forward at the emergency Arab summit held in Cairo from 21 to 23 June 1996 in order to resolve the conflict between the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the three countries concerned.

The Republic of Yemen renews its call to the fraternal countries of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates to continue a direct dialogue aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement of the issue of the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of good neighbourliness and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States in the region, and to resort to international arbitration in a manner that will satisfy both parties.

Our country also emphasizes its solidarity with fraternal Bahrain and expresses its complete support for the measures it has taken to ensure its security and stability.

The tragic situation of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina has preoccupied the Yemeni people. The Republic of Yemen therefore welcomes the Agreements that the parties involved in the conflict reached last November in Dayton and Paris in order to bring peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to express its satisfaction with the contents of the Agreements, which stressed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On this occasion, we wish to register our appreciation of the efforts made by the United States of America and the States of the European Union to bring about these Agreements. We call upon the international community to provide every possible support to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and their plans for the development and reconstruction of their country. We would also stress the need for every party to surrender all war criminals to the International Tribunal in The Hague so that they may be brought to account for their heinous crimes against humanity in violation of international law, human rights and international agreements.

The Republic of Yemen, in view of its geographical position on the Indian Ocean, places particular importance on any effort made to strengthen cooperation between the Ocean's littoral States. Accordingly, our country took part in the most recent meeting, held in Mauritius, to complete the drafting of the constitution and platform of action for the planned Indian Ocean rim initiative.

We take this opportunity to express our satisfaction with the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean to implement the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, free of nuclear weapons. We call upon the permanent members of the Security Council and maritime users of the Indian Ocean to participate in the work of the Committee in order to strengthen security, peace, stability and cooperation in the region in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions.

In conclusion, I should like to express our hope that the work of this session will enjoy every success, strengthening the United Nations and its bodies and enabling them to achieve their goals and the ideals embodied in the Charter in a manner appropriate to the spirit of the age and international changes.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, His Excellency Mr. Roberto Robaina González.

Mr. Robaina González (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): A year ago, from this same rostrum, I began my statement by reading some 10 hair-raising news items of the moment from the international press, on bellicose conflicts, violence and death in the cities and deadly epidemics claiming new victims. Intending to do this again today, I found that the situation remains the same, or is perhaps even worse. Unfortunately, the world wasted another 12 months without doing anything to stop such catastrophic events.

As if it were necessary to illustrate this with specific facts, even as we gathered here we once again witnessed the bloodshed of the heroic Palestinian people. First and foremost, I denounce the new Israeli aggression and the policy of hegemony that defends these acts, and I express support for our Palestinian brothers in their struggle for their legitimate right to finally have an independent state, with Jerusalem its capital.

Also about a year ago, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the country of the President of the General Assembly, very rightly stated that the United Nations should support the collective needs of peoples and nations in order to serve humanity as a whole, and that it was therefore necessary to correct the trend of making them an instrument of the wealthy and the powerful. Today it must be recognized that we are meeting again without having removed that danger.

Hence, in expressing my Government's satisfaction at having President Razali lead us in our work, I cannot but express confidence that his diplomatic professionalism, his personal achievements and his long and proven experience in the work of this Organization will give him strength in leading us in a remarkably difficult and complex session of the General Assembly.

Far from being more democratic and universal, the Organization in which we come together today is tending to tighten more and more the exclusive circle of those who govern it. The just demands heard from this rostrum are now sounding the alarm at the march of ideas being promoted mainly in our host country.

Just a few weeks ago, the Chairman of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued an ultimatum for the United Nations to carry out reforms in accordance with the prescriptions of that country or else face the consequences. His articles in renowned publications question precisely the principles on which this institution is founded, particularly the principle of sovereign equality of States.

For this influential United States politician and those who identify themselves with his primitive views, there is only one argument: some States deserve more privileges than others. In this way they try to make a dead letter of the principle of sovereign equality of States, the cornerstone of the Charter adopted over 50 years ago in San Francisco.

But there is more: the Government of the United States of America, which owes the United Nations the shameful amount of over $1.5 billion, assumes, with no embarrassment whatsoever, the right to determine unilaterally who can or cannot be the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to declare how an Organization deliberately deprived of the resources required for the fulfilment of its functions should or should not be managed.

Eighty per cent of the work of the United Nations system is devoted to assisting the developing countries and to strengthening their ability to help themselves. This endeavour includes the aspiration to receive fair treatment in international economic relations; to try to save children from starvation and disease; to promote emergency assistance to refugees and disaster victims; to attempt to combat crime, drug addiction and disease; to promote education and the development of human resources; and to tackle the enormous task of halting or slowing the progressive ecological deterioration of our planet.

These are precisely the functions that the notorious United States Senator is trying to abolish, and it is because of the existence of those programmes that the managerial approach of the Secretary-General is so fiercely attacked.

That position of the planet's most powerful country is not aimed against one person; rather, using the question of the Organization's efficiency as a pretext, it

stands against the United Nations mandate to attend to the needs of the great majority of mankind. It is a new and gross attempt to impose on the community of nations the will of a single State in the management of the multilateral forum of cooperation that should be the most representative and democratic one in the world.

We should ask ourselves if we, the members of this Assembly, can passively accept the threat posed by this unilateral imposition. It is fitting to recall what Harry Truman said of the Charter of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference in 1945:

> "If we fail to use it, we shall betray all those who have died in order that we might meet here in freedom and safety to create it.
>
> "If we seek to use it selfishly — for the advantage of any one nation or any small group of nations — we shall be equally guilty of that betrayal." *(Documents of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, San Francisco, 1945, vol. 1, p. 687)*

Further comment is unnecessary; subsequent history has been quite eloquent enough. But the most dangerous thing, as has often been said, is that the United Nations is merely the reflection of the world in which we live. This domineering unilateralism shows up even more crudely in the daily conduct of international relations. In a world in which relations of respect, good-neighbourliness and cooperation among the peoples and Governments should be fostered every day, the fact is that one Power, resting on its unquestionable economic, military and technological might, seeks to impose rules and norms of conduct on the rest of the world, thus undermining the sovereign rights of each and every one of our nations.

What political, legal or moral reason underlies and legitimizes the missile attack against the Republic of Iraq by the United States Armed Forces just a few days ago? What principles or claims can be used to cover up the unilateral and unjustified use of force? The Security Council did not yield to that unilateral aggression, but it has not been able to formulate a clear position on the matter because of its well-known structural and procedural deficiencies and also because of the tolerance and impunity with which the international community has recently accepted the haughty arrogance of a Government that assumes the right to punish sovereign nations at its whim under spurious pretexts.

There is no justification for trampling the territorial integrity of a full-fledged Member of this Organization, and even less for that action to be taken by a single Government, nor for threatening the peace and security of a region inhabited by tens of millions of persons. And all this has taken place while the political experts of the aggressor country could not agree on which was its strongest motivation: the wretched oil interests or the frenzy of the ongoing carnival-like electoral campaign in the United States.

It is incredible that world politics can be paralysed, that foreign ministries postpone decisions and that Governments advance or delay responses to national or international dilemmas, thinking only of their repercussions in that North American simulacrum of democracy. Anything can happen, and no country, legal precept or moral principle seems to be safe. Fortunately, the super-elections are held only every four years, because if they took place annually, like the sessions of the General Assembly, living on this planet would be true madness.

The Helms-Burton Act, aimed against everyone's sovereignty and against Cuba, a sovereign State, was conceived as an additional effort to subdue our people through hunger and poverty. It is an eloquent example of the absurd will to impose imperial designs on sovereign and independent countries in the conduct of their own international and trade relations. For that reason, it has been unanimously rejected by the international community. That law, ignoring the General Assembly resolutions on the issue, is intended to strengthen further the blockade against our country.

For a century — and especially during the last 37 years — the Cuban people have had to face the hegemonic vocation of successive United States Governments. The extraterritorial ambitions of our neighbour, its attempts to question the sovereign decisions of another State and its violation of the universally recognized principles of international trade are realities with which Cuba has been familiar for a long time.

When we denounced the crime that was about to take place, it was neither to frighten nor to play with anyone. The Helms-Burton Act, the most sophisticated bungle of the economic war against Cuba, attacks many countries and compels them to experience in their own sovereignty what we Cubans have been facing for a long time. The world can now better understand what so many

years of continuous offences and extraterritorial acts have meant for my homeland.

Another instance of unipolarity and of the attempt to dictate the conduct of sovereign States is the law known as D'Amato-Kennedy, which has also received universal repudiation. It repeats the philosophy of imposition and ratifies the tendency to apply United States law beyond its borders. The argument for this is the alleged war against terrorism, when, in fact, the United States was the main promoter of terrorism in its dirty wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola and South Africa, against the Palestinian patriots and in many other countries — the United States has always supported the bloodiest regimes that have ever existed in this world.

There are just causes and unjust causes. No one will ever have the right to kill innocent people, regardless of the objectives being pursued. This does not negate any people's right to use weapons against its oppressors: to fight cleanly, yes; to kill innocents, never. A State cannot be allowed to arrogate to itself the right to accuse, condemn and sanction other nations and to impose by force an illegitimate crusade that often serves to disguise the real terrorists.

Cuba — which has been the victim of many terrorist actions and has for many years faced repeated attempts on the lives of its political leaders, as well as sabotage, biological warfare, the destruction of a passenger plane in flight and the hijacking of aircraft, and which suffers even today from armed infiltrations and which has been, above all, the victim of brutal economic terrorism — expects a joint and conscious effort from the international community to address the terrorism that has its origins in Langley, Virginia — that is to say, at the Central Intelligence Agency — and later spreads to many countries of the world.

Drug trafficking, in our opinion, should be dealt with in the same manner. The drug issue should not be transformed into an instrument of pressure against underdeveloped countries, many of which do not have sufficient resources to tackle this scourge. This problem has taken on global dimensions and can be confronted only by sharing responsibilities and using the mechanisms offered by the United Nations.

The policy of conferring arbitrary certifications is unacceptable, and even more so is its use as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign nations. The country whose enormous rates of consumption have become the main market for and driving force behind this criminal industry, the country in whose territory the greatest profits of this business are generated, does not have the moral authority to assign responsibility to or demand it from others. What would happen if the world, truly concerned by the scourge of drugs, were to decertify unanimously the greatest drug consumer? To put it another way, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones, and he who has a beam in his eye should not be so concerned about the mote in another's.

No one can disregard the immense influence of the United States in the so-called post-cold-war period, but mankind would be making a mistake if it were to look with indifference upon the currents of thought within that country that entertain the possibility of governing the rest of the world or of acting with utter disregard for the rights and interests of other peoples. We are facing a King Kong escaped from his cage, destroying and crushing everything around him, aimlessly and out of control.

We are not trying to convince this forum that the United States is the source of all the evils of the planet, but it would be a mistake to ignore reality and not to take timely preventive actions — preferably collective ones — to admonish to sanity the persons charged with guiding that country politically, to do so with a minimum of responsibility and to understand that the power of any nation, important as it might be, has its limits.

The world is more plagued by uncertainty today than when the new world order was demagogically proclaimed. On the threshold of the new millennium, the numbers of armed conflicts between States, ethnic groups and religions have increased. What we see everywhere is not a new order but, rather, a disquieting world in perfect disorder. The social and economic consequences of these conflicts have no parallel in contemporary history, but we cannot simply pretend that military imposition, coercion and sanctions are a universal panacea that can solve the numerous humanitarian problems of the world.

Inequalities, rampant underdevelopment, globalization and the interdependence that is increasingly turning into the worst form of dependency should disappear so that these new conflicts may, in turn, be eradicated for ever from this world, which, based on injustice, is becoming increasingly ungovernable.

Economic models based on neoliberal philosophy have spread throughout much of the third world with the support of the international financial institutions. Although these models have generated deceptive, apparently attractive macroeconomic indicators, in practice they go hand in hand with an increase in poverty, marginalization, environmental degradation, disease, ignorance, social conflict, a loss of national resources and sovereignty — in short, with the most brutal and increasingly irreversible underdevelopment.

This neoliberal school of thought is based on artificial paradigms that should be unmasked. It is false that the market, with its magical invisible hand, is the definitive solution for the immense disruptions affecting the international economy and that it is the miraculous remedy that would liberate many countries, home to the vast majority of the earth's population, from underdevelopment and poverty.

It is false that absolute privatization, which can benefit only the few, brings well-being to the legions of the poor and the wretched living in the third world.

It is false that geography determines the economic power of peoples.

It is false that genetics determines which human beings are born to be poor and wretched and which are born under the shining star of wealth and extravagance.

It is false that the State or Government is the main source of corruption and inefficiency and should renounce responsibility for welfare, health and education, leaving these obligations mainly in private hands whose motivations will always be limited and discriminatory and are frequently based on greed.

It is false that the poor, the oppressed and the exploited should have a lesser role in ultra-modern societies.

It is false that social justice and equity always have to be sacrificed for the sake of commercial efficiency.

It is false that the total removal of protection for national industries in the developing countries will yield higher productivity, wealth, employment and well-being for their peoples.

It is false that the sovereignty of nations is an outmoded principle of international coexistence and that Governments and countries are ready to abandon it because of the strength of transnational capital and the social-political models exported by the North.

Finally, it is false that the neoliberal models that have been sold to us will raise the indicators or levels of human development set as objectives by the United Nations.

One should check the statistics and compare annual reports, not just between one country and another, but also between indicators for the third world from one year to the next in areas such as infant mortality, poverty, education, life expectancy, access to drinking water, human settlements, schooling for children, and doctors per number of inhabitants.

All these falsities, many of them recorded in United Nations documents, hide the bankruptcy of development prospects for most of the poor countries, which is already threatening world stability and aggravating the ecological deterioration we all recognized several years ago at the historic Rio Conference. The poor are already falling into the immense and ever wider chasm separating them from the rich, who continue to grow disproportionately and irresponsibly without realizing that sooner or later their own weight will also drag them down into the same pit.

And, in this aberrant context, what are we to say about the arms race? The rivalry between the big Powers and the arms race have supposedly disappeared. Why, then, in spite of the adoption of international instruments supposedly to that end, is there such resistance to real nuclear disarmament that will free humanity for ever from that scourge? Who is responsible for the fact that the recently adopted Treaty to ban all nuclear tests does not cover simulated laboratory tests in which new lethal weapons will be perfected by those who monopolize them, or any commitment to the destruction of arsenals? Unless we discover life in other galaxies, where will the enemies endangering the big Powers come from?

Fifty-one years after the creation of the United Nations, instead of seeing wealth and development extend from the North to the South, we see the growing threat of underdevelopment moving inexorably from the South to the North.

It is said that hunger and poverty are on the rise. In fact, what has also happened is that wealth is more and more concentrated, increasingly exclusive and limited, while walls higher than the one that fell in Berlin are being built.

Let us be frank: the North is not as rich as it seems, nor is the South as poor as they want to make it. Almost all the wealth of the North comes from the wealth and resources of the South. And all the hunger and poverty of the South is nothing other than the legacy of over 500 years of exploitation and disregard for our human rights.

If we cannot reverse this situation collectively, by sharing the burden and improving living conditions in the developing countries, no one will be able to stop the waves of migrants attracted by the siren's song of wealthy and opulent societies.

The United Nations has a vast arsenal of documents, resolutions and initiatives conceived for those purposes but never implemented. Soon it will be too late. Today we can still act.

While all this is happening, the blockade of Cuba continues. With the Helms-Burton Act, it has become even clearer that it is not just an embargo, because in the last few months, the United States, through its words and deeds, has sent the world sure signals that what is really being waged against my country is a long and dirty economic war for total control over our sovereignty and our markets.

The criminal blockade, as part of its frightening network of measures created over 35 years, has now a Draconian law that publicly calls for a world crusade to change forcibly the Cuban constitutional order and undo a revolution defended by our people at the cost of their lives.

What have we come to when United States diplomats, on the ugliest mission since the Viet Nam war, tell the world that they are granting it a few months' sovereignty before trampling upon it if the world does not join their war on Cuba?

I am fulfilling the mandate bestowed on me by the free people of Cuba to proclaim in front of the international community of nations that we will persevere in our efforts to defend our social, political and economic actions aimed at ensuring equality, justice and well-being for all Cubans.

Our own experience is the best contribution we can make as a nation towards meeting the enormous challenges facing humanity, as has been shown by Cuba's economic, political and social achievements in the last year. A country that has overcome a serious economic crisis, that maintains its governability, that grows and develops with the solidarity of many, that expands its relations throughout the world and that grows stronger — this is a country with a future.

The socialism we have chosen for our homeland is our only emancipatory, moral and ethical alternative, with roots firmly planted in the history of our nation. It is a path that we chose in freedom and sovereignty, a path that we shall not renounce and that no one imposed on us.

We wish to live in harmony with all the countries of the world, including the United States. Cuba wants and needs peace. But let us be clear: Cuba is not and never will be willing to sacrifice, under pressure from anyone or in exchange for anything, the independence, sovereignty and self-determination that it has achieved and defended at such a high price.

Today, in that blue Caribbean that shelters us, we Cubans will continue with our heads held high, with our feet on the ground and with our eyes on the future. Thus do we defend our choice: to live in the free and sovereign homeland dreamed of by our founding fathers and achieved by our fathers and grandfathers.

Let there be no doubt. We shall overcome.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.